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THE DUTY  
OF THE  
AMERICAN SCHOLAR  
TO  
POLITICS AND THE TIMES.

AN ORATION,  
DELIVERED  
ON TUESDAY, AUGUST 5, 1856,  
BEFORE THE  
LITERARY SOCIETIES OF WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY.  
MIDDLETOWN, CONN.

BY  
GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS.

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NEW YORK:  
DIX, EDWARDS & CO., 321 BROADWAY.  
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TO

JOSIAH QUINCY,

The scholar and patriot, who, born with our great revolution,  
has always illustrated the principles that made it  
great, this discourse is, with affectionate  
veneration, inscribed.

NEW YORK, August 20, 1856.



## ORATION.

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GENTLEMEN : The summer is our literary festival. We are not a scholarly people, but we devote to the honor of literature some of our loveliest days. When the leaves are greenest, and the mower's scythe sings through the grass ; when plenty is on the earth, and splendor in the heavens, we gather from a thousand pursuits, to celebrate the jubilee of the scholar.

No man who loves literature, or who can, in any way, claim the scholar's privilege, but is glad to associate the beauty of the season with the object of the occasion ; and grace with flowers, and sunshine, and universal summer, the homage which is thus paid to the eternal interests of the human mind.

We are glad of it, as scholars, because the season is the symbol of the character and influence of scholarly pursuits. Like sunshine, a spirit of generous thought illuminates the world. Like

trees of golden fruit in the landscape, are the philosophers and poets in history. Happy the day! Happy the place! The roses and the stars wreath our festival with an immortal garland.

Too young to be your guide and philosopher, I am yet old enough to be your friend. Too little in advance of you in the great battle of life to teach you from experience, I am yet old enough to share with you the profit of the experience of other men and of history. I do not come to-day a mounted general. I hurry, at your call, to place myself beside you, shoulder to shoulder, a private in the ranks. We are all young men; we are all young Americans; we are all young American scholars. Our interests and duties are the same. I speak to you as to comrades. Let us rest a moment, that we may the better fight. Here, in this beautiful valley, under these spreading trees, we bivouac for a summer hour. Our knapsacks are unslung, and our arms are stacked. We give this tranquil hour to the consideration of our position and duties.

The occasion prescribes my theme; the times determine its treatment.

That theme is the scholar; the lesson of the day is the duty of the American scholar to politics.

I would gladly speak to you of the charms of pure scholarship; of the dignity and worth of the



scholar ; of the abstract relation of the scholar to the State. The sweet air we breathe, and the repose of mid-summer, invite a calm ethical or intellectual discourse. But, would you have counted him a friend of Greece, who quietly discussed the abstract nature of patriotism on that Greek summer day, through whose hopeless and immortal hours Leonidas and his three hundred stood at Thermopylæ for liberty? And, to-day, as the scholar meditates that deed, the air that steals in at his window darkens his study, and suffocates him as he reads. Drifting across a continent, and blighting the harvests that gild it with plenty from the Atlantic to the Mississippi, a black cloud obscures the page that records an old crime, and compels him to know that freedom always has its Thermopylæ, and that his Thermopylæ is called Kansas.

Because we are scholars of to-day, shall we shrink from touching the interests of to-day? Because we are scholars, shall we cease to be citizens? Because we are scholars, shall we cease to be men?

Gentlemen, I am glad that, speaking of the duty of the American scholar to the times, I can point to one who fully understands that duty, and has illustrated it, as Milton did. Among fellow-countrymen, that scholar falls defending

the name and rights of his countrymen ; and one of those countrymen stares at him, as he lies insensible, and will not raise him, lest his motives be misunderstood ; and another turns his back upon his bleeding colleague, because for two years he has not been upon speaking terms with him. Gentlemen, the human heart is just, and no traitor to humanity escapes his proper doom. Sacred history hands down to endless infamy the Priest and the Levite who passed by on the other side. Among gentlemen, this scholar pleads the cause dear to every gentleman in history, and a bully strikes him down. In a republic of free men, this scholar speaks for freedom, and his blood stains the Senate floor. There it will blush through all our history. That damned spot will never out from memory, from tradition, or from noble hearts. Every scholar degrades his order, and courts the pity of all generous men, who can see a just liberty threatened, without deserting every other cause to defend liberty. Of what-use are your books ? Of what use is your scholarship ? Without freedom of thought, there is no civilization or human progress ; and, without freedom of speech, liberty of thought is a mockery.

I know well that a conventional prejudice consecrates this occasion to dull abstractions and timid, if not treacherous, generalities. It would allow me

to speak of the scholar, and of the American scholar, in his relation to Greek roots and particles, but would forbid me to mention his duties to American topics and times. I might speak of him as a professor, a dialectician, a dictionary, a grammar, but I must not speak of him as a man. I know that a literary orator is held to be bound by the same decencies that regulate the preacher. But what are those decencies? Is the preacher to rebuke the sins of Jerusalem, or of Philadelphia? Is he to say in general, "be good," when he sees in what particulars we are bad, and counsel silence and peace, when silence and peace are treason to God and man? Are the liars to cry to the preacher, "It is not your business to denounce lying; we pay you to preach against sin?" But the preachers' Master cried, "Woe unto you Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for ye devour widows' houses." He specified sins, and classified sinners. In our day the hot adjuration to a clergyman not to soil his pulpit with politics, is merely the way in which the nineteenth century offers him the thirty pieces of silver.

What are politics but the Divine law applied to human government? Politics are the science of the relation of men in human society; and as the founder of Christianity taught peace and good-will to men, how can the Christian preacher better

fulfill his office than by showing how peace and good-will may be introduced among men, and by exposing, in all the terror of truth, those whose policy fosters war and hatred among men? Why does the pulpit command so little comparative respect, but because it does not apply truth to life? When the American people has great sins to account for, the smooth preacher touches with the dull edge of his reproof the sins of the Jewish people. Therefore, with us, the lecture-room is more thronged than the church, because the lecturer addresses the moral sense of the people upon their moral interests, and the most popular lecturers are the preachers who are most faithful in their pulpits to God and man—for their cause is one.

What is true of the preacher is true of the orator. I should insult your manhood, I should forget my own, if, in addressing you to-day, and here, I did not say what I conceive to be the duty of the scholar to-day, and here.

I. Of the scholar. The popular idea of the scholar makes him a pale student of books, a recluse, a valetudinarian, an unpractical and impracticable man. He is a being with an endless capacity of literary and scientific acquisition. He is only a consumer, not a producer; or, if so, only a producer of useless results. Learning is supposed to be put into him, not as vegetables into the



ground, whence, as they spring again, covering the earth with beauty, and feeding the race, so learning is to flower into heroic deeds, and consoling thoughts ; but it is absorbed by him, as vegetables are thrown into a cellar, where they lie buried, not planted, producing only some poor, pallid, useless shoot, as his learning only germinates into some treatise upon the ablative absolute.

In the old plays and romances we have the same picture of an absent pedant, the easy prey of every knave, the docile husband of a termagant ; who, because he could read a tragedy of Æschylus, could not tie his shoes. He belonged to great establishments as an encyclopedia, in the same way that the fool belonged to them as a jest-book. Scholars were popularly ranked with women, having all their weakness, and none of their charms.

This estimate grew naturally out of their exceptional character as monks ; for, at the beginning of modern history, learning came out of the monasteries with the ecclesiastics. By religious vows the monks were separated from all secular interests, including the family relation. The reputation of the scholar arose from the character of the monk. The monk was a man who dealt professionally with ideas rather than men. He was therefore held to know nothing of men. Dreamer,

poet, vagabond, and scholar, grew to be synonymous names. But while the mass of monks undoubtedly justified this judgment, it is in the few and not in the mass that their characteristics are to be sought; they were accused of not knowing men, but Gregory was a monk, and they belonged to the most sagacious organization in human history. They were called pedants and moles, but Abelard and Martin Luther were churchmen and scholars. To call grammarians, formalists, and swollen sponges of learning, scholars, is to call a parish clerk a statesman. To call Bentley and Parr scholars, is to insult Johnson and Milton. Sydney Smith tells of Dr. George—who, hearing the great king of Prussia highly praised, said that he had his doubts whether the king, with all his victories, knew how to conjugate a Greek verb in *mi*. If you call Dr. George, and Wolff, and Heyne scholars, what name have you for Goethe and Schiller?

In any just classification of human powers and pursuits, the scholar is the representative of thought. Devoted to the contemplation of truth, he is, in the state, a public conscience by which public measures may be tested; the scholarly class, therefore, to which, now, as of old, the clergy belong, is the upper house in the politics of the world.

Now, there is a constant tendency in material prosperity, when it is the prosperity of a class and not of the mass, to relax the severity of principle. Therefore, we find that the era of noble thought in national history is not usually coincident with the greatest national prosperity. Greece was not greatest when rumors of war had ceased. Rome was not most imperial in the voluptuous calm of Constantinopolitan decay. The magnificent monotony of Bourbon tyranny in France, and the reign of its shop-keeping king, were not the grand eras of French history. Holland began as generously as America, and Holland has sunk into the imbecile apathy of commercial prosperity, without art, without literature, without a noble influence in the world, and with no promise of the future.

When Napoleon reviled England as a nation of shopkeepers, it was not an idle phrase. Napoleon knew, that, both historically and in the nature of the case, it was the tendency of a long peace to foster trade, and that it is the inevitable tendency of trade, which is based upon self-interest, to destroy moral courage, because trade demands peace at any price, and peace is often to be purchased only by principle. When he said a nation of shopkeepers, he meant a nation whose ruling principle was private gain, rather than public good ; and the

sagacious ruler knew that corruption and cowardice are twins.

The tendency of selfish trade is demoralizing, because its eagerness for peace constantly lowers the moral ideal. The private pocket inevitably becomes the arbiter of public policy. Plausibility supplants honesty ; sophistication takes the place of simplicity, and the certain evils of the existing condition are resolutely preferred to the splendid possibilities of progress.

Thus it arises that the very material success for which nations, like individuals, strive, is full of the gravest danger to the best life of the state, as of the individual. But as in human nature itself are found the qualities which best resist the proclivity of an individual to meanness and moral cowardice—as each man has a conscience, a moral mentor which assures him what is truly best for him to do—so has every state a class, which, by its very character, is dedicated to eternal and not to temporary interests ; whose members are priests of the mind, not of the body, and who are necessarily the conservative party of intellectual and moral freedom.

This is the class of scholars. This elevation and correction of public sentiment is the scholar's office in the state.

To the right discharge of this duty all his learning is merely subsidiary ; and if he fail to devote



it to this end, he is recreant to his duty. The end of all scholarly attainment is to live nobly. If a man read books merely to know books, he is a tree planted only to blossom. If he read books to apply their wisdom to life, then he is a tree planted to bear glorious fruit. He does not think for himself alone, nor hoard a thought as a miser a diamond. He spends for the world. Scholarship is not only the knowledge that makes books, but the wisdom which inspires that knowledge. The scholar is not necessarily a learned man, but he is a wise man. If he be personally a recluse, his voice and influence are never secluded. If the *man* be a hermit, his mind is a citizen of the world.

If, then, such be the scholar, and the scholar's office, if he be truly the conscience of the state, the fundamental law of his life is liberty. At every cost, the true scholar asserts and defends liberty of thought, and liberty of speech. Of what use to a man is a thought that will help the world, if he cannot tell it to the world? Such a thought comes to him as Jupiter came to Semele. He is consumed by the splendor that secretly possesses him. The Inquisition condemns Galileo's creed. *Pur muove*—still it moves—replies Galileo in his dungeon. Tyranny poisons the cup of Socrates; he smilingly drains it to the health of the world. The church, towering vast in the midst of universal supersti-

tion, lays its withering finger upon the freedom of the human mind, and its own child, leaping from its bosom, denounces to the world his mother's madness.

I speak, of course, of the ideal scholar, of what the scholar ought to be, rather than of the historical men who have been called scholars ; and yet, I think we shall find the man whom we should select from history as *the scholar*, as also the man who most nearly fulfills the conditions I have mentioned.

In English history, which is also our history, who is the scholar? Is it Roger Ascham, a pedant and a schoolmaster? Is it Ben Jonson, with his careless, cumbrous ease, borrowing his shilling, fighting his duel, writing his plays and his stately verses, and lighting up the "Mermaid" with his witty revelry? Is it either of the churchmen—even Jeremy Taylor, whose written wisdom breathes like organ music through English literature ; or George Herbert, whose life shone with the beauty of holiness? Is it the sad Swift, the versatile Addison, the keen Pope, or the fastidious Gray, noting when crocuses opened, and roses bloomed, leaving one poem and the record of a life as inoffensive as that of a college cat ; or Bentley, or Porson, or Parr, who made valuable notes on valuable Greek classics ; or Dr. Johnson,

gravely supporting an aristocratic public policy, while he powerfully and pathetically rebuked aristocratic private conduct? Let the name of Dr. Johnson never be mentioned among scholars without a sad respect; but is he, distinctively, *the scholar* in English history?

There is one man, gentlemen, I have not mentioned. Your hearts go before my tongue to name him. Technical scholarship begins in a dictionary, and ends in a grammar. The sublime scholarship of John Milton began in literature and ended in life.

Graced with every intellectual gift, he was personally so comely, that the romantic woods of Vallambrosa are lovelier from their association with his youthful figure sleeping in their shade. He had all the technical excellences of the scholar. At eighteen he wrote better Latin verses than have been written in England. He replied to the Italian poets who complimented him, in purer Italian than their own. He was profoundly skilled in theology, in science, and in the pure literature of all languages.

These were his accomplishments, but his genius was vast and vigorous. While yet a youth, he wrote those minor poems, which have the simple perfection of productions of nature; and, in the ripeness of his wisdom and power, he

turned his blind eyes to heaven, and sang the lofty song which has given him a twin glory with Shakespeare in English renown.

It is much for one man to have exhausted the literature of other nations, and to have enriched his own. But other men have done this in various degrees. Milton went beyond it to complete the circle of his character as the scholar.

You know the culmination of his life. The first scholar in England, and in the world at that time, fulfilled his office. His vocation making him especially the representative of liberty, he accepted the part to which he was naturally called, and, turning away from all the blandishments of ease and fame, he gave himself to liberty and immortality.

Is the scholar a puny, timid, conforming man? John Milton showed him to be the greatest citizen of the greatest Commonwealth. Disdaining to talk of the liberty of the Shunamites, when the liberty of Englishmen was imperilled, he exposed the details of a blind tyranny in words which are still the delight and refuge of freedom, and whose music is majestic as the cause they celebrate. The radiance of those principles is still the glory of history. They still search out and expose the wiles of tyranny, as the light of a great beacon, flashing at midnight upon a mountain top, reveals the tents of the enemy skulking on the plain.



While the men of Norfolk, and of the fens, were mustering to march away for liberty—to return no more—he did not stay to conjugate Greek verbs in *mi*, nor conceive that the scholar's library was his post of honor. In words that are the eternal rebuke of every scholar, of every literary man, of every clergyman, who, in a day when human liberty is threatened, does not stand for liberty, but cringes under the courtesies of position, Milton cries to us across two hundred years, with a voice of multitudinous music, like that of a great wind in a forest: “I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race where that immortal garland is to be run for, notwithstanding dust and heat.”

Can you not fancy the parish beadles getting up and walking rapidly away from such sentiments? Can you not fancy all the noble and generous hearts in the world shouting through all the centuries, “amen, amen!”

Gentlemen, the scholar is the representative of thought among men, and his duty to society is the effort to introduce thought and the sense of justice into human affairs. He was not made a scholar to satisfy the newspapers or the parish beadles, but to serve God and man. While other men pursue what is expedient, and watch with alarm the flick-

ering of the funds, he is to pursue the truth, and watch the eternal law of justice.

But if this be true of the scholar in general, how peculiarly is it true of the American scholar, who, as a citizen of a republic, has not only an influence by his word and example, but, by his vote, a direct agency upon public affairs. In a republic which decides questions involving the national welfare by a majority of voices, whoever refuses to vote is a traitor to his own cause, whatever that cause may be ; and if any scholar will not vote, nor have an opinion upon great public measures, because that would be to mix himself with politics, but contents himself with vague declamation about freedom in general, knowing that the enemies of Freedom always use its name, then that scholar is a traitor to Liberty, and degrades his order by justifying the reproach that the scholar is a pusillanimous trimmer.

The American scholar, gentlemen, has duties to politics in general ; and he has, consequently, duties to every political crisis in his country ; what his duties are in this crisis of our national affairs, I shall now tell you, as plainly as I can. The times are grave, and they demand sober speech. To us young men the future of this country is intrusted. What names does history love, and every honest man revere ? The names of those who gave

their youth and strength to the cause which is waiting for us to serve it.

II. The object of human government is human liberty. Laws restrain the encroachment of the individual upon society in order that all individuals may be secured the freest play of their powers. This is because the end of society is the improvement of the individual, and the development of the race. Liberty is, therefore, the condition of human progress, and, consequently, that is the best government which gives to men the largest liberty and constantly modifies itself in the interest of Freedom.

The laws of society, indeed, deprive men of liberty, and even of life, but only when by crime they have become injurious to society. The deprivation of the life or liberty of the individual under other circumstances, is the outrage of those rights which are instinctively perceived by every man, but are beyond argument or proof.

Human Slavery annihilates the conditions of human progress. Its necessary result is the destruction of humanity; and this not only directly by its effect upon the slave, but indirectly by its effect upon the master. In the one it destroys the self-respect which is the basis of manhood, and is thus a capital crime against humanity. In the other it fosters pride, indolence, luxury, and licentiousness, which

equally imbrute the human being. Therefore, in slave states there is no literature, no art, no progressive civilization. Manners are fantastic and fierce; brute force supplants moral principle; freedom of speech is suppressed because the natural speech of man condemns slavery; a sensitive vanity is called honor, and cowardly swagger, chivalry; respect for woman is destroyed by universal licentiousness; lazy indifference is called gallantry, and an impudent familiarity, cordiality. To supply by a travesty of courage the want of manly honor, men deliberately shoot those who expose their falsehoods. Therefore, they go armed with knives and pistols, for it is a cardinal article of a code of false honor that it is possible for a bully to insult a gentleman. Founded upon crime, for by no other word can man-stealing be characterized, the prosperity of such a people is at the mercy of an indignant justice. Hence a slave society has the characteristics of wandering tribes, which rob, and live, therefore, insecure in the shadow of impending vengeance. There is nothing admirable in such a society but what its spirit condemns; there is nothing permanent in it but decay. Against nature, against reason, against the human instinct, against the Divine law, the institution of human slavery is the most dreadful that philosophy contemplates, or the imagination



conceives. Certainly, some individual slaveholders are good men, but the mass of men are never better than their institutions; and certainly some slaves are better fed and lodged than some free laborers; but so are many horses better fed and lodged than some free laborers; is, therefore, a laborer to abdicate his manhood and become a horse? and, certainly, as it exists, God may, in a certain sense, be said to permit it; but in the same way God permitted the slaughter of the innocents in Judea, and he permitted the awful railway slaughter, not a month ago, near Philadelphia. Do you mean that as comfort for the mothers of Judea, and the mothers of Pennsylvania?

History confirms what philosophy teaches. The eastern nations and the Spanish colonies, Rome in her decline, and the southern states of America, display a society of which the spirit is similar, however much the phenomena may differ. Moral self-respect is the first condition of national life, as labor is the first condition of national prosperity; but the laborer cannot have moral respect unless he be free.

The true national policy, therefore, is that which ennobles and dignifies labor. Cincinnatus, upon his farm, is the ideal of the citizen. But slavery disgraces labor, by making the laborer a brute, while it makes the slaveholder the imme-

diate rival of the free laborer in all the markets of the world. Hence, Tiberius Gracchus, one of the greatest of Roman citizens, early saw that, in a state where an oligarchy at the same time monopolized and disgraced labor, there must necessarily be a vast demoralized population, who would demand support of the state, and be ready for the service of the demagogue, who is always the tyrant. Gracchus was killed, but the issue proved the prophet. The canker which Rome cherished in her bosom, ate out the heart of Rome, and the empire whose splendor flashed over the whole world, fell like a blighted tree. Not until slavery had barbarized the great mass of the Romans, did Rome fall a prey to the barbarians from abroad.

Gentlemen, it is a disgrace for all of us, that in this country, and in this year of our history, the occasion should require me to state such principles and facts as these. History seems to be an endless iteration. But it is not so. Do not lose heart. It only seems so because there has been but one great cause in human affairs—the cause of liberty. In a thousand forms, under a thousand names, the old contest has been waged. It divided the politics of Greece and Rome, of England, France, America, into two parties; so that the history of liberty is the history of the world.

As American citizens, we are called upon to

fight that battle by resisting the extension of the institution which I have described. The advocacy of the area of its extension is not a whim of the slave power, but is based upon the absolute necessities of the system. An institution which is mentally and morally pernicious cannot be economically advantageous. To suppose so is to accuse God of putting a premium upon sin. The system of slave labor, by demoralizing the population and exhausting the soil, absolutely demands expansion.

Of this economical fact there can be no doubt. The state of Virginia, for instance, has a finer climate, richer and cheaper soils, with less expensive means of developing their wealth, than Pennsylvania, New York, and Massachusetts. At the Revolution Virginia had twice the population of Pennsylvania, much more disposable capital, and the best facilities for external commerce and internal communication. In 1850, the cash value of farms in Pennsylvania was \$25 an acre. In Virginia, \$8 an acre. In New Jersey, with a soil inferior to that of Virginia, the average value of farming land is \$44 an acre. Governor Johnson, late governor of Virginia, says, that at a period not very remote, her trade exceeded that of all New England ; and Norfolk surpassed New York in the extent of her shipping. At the Revolution, the commerce of Virginia was four times that of

New York. In 1853, the imports into New York were \$180,000,000, and into Virginia, less than \$400,000. Lands in Virginia capable of producing twenty-five to thirty bushels of wheat to the acre, and only twenty-four hours by rail from New York, are to be had for a fortieth of the price of similar lands in New York itself.

Virginia is a northern slave state, but a senator from Alabama, the most southern of the slave states, confesses of his own home: "a country in its infancy, where fifty years ago scarce a forest-tree had been felled by the pioneer, is already exhibiting the painful signs of senility and decay apparent in Virginia and the Carolinas."

These are specimens of the statistics which are to be found in books that any man can read. All the travellers tell the same story. They find fat slaves, and a starved and exhausted soil. Desolation, like a miasma, broods upon the land.

Extension of area is therefore vital to the system, and we shall find that the political power of slavery in the United States has been constantly directed to the acquisition of territory.

When the Union was formed, the system of slave labor existed in all of the states except Massachusetts. At the North, however, it was nominal only; several of the states had provided for its removal, and it soon disappeared. The Constitu-



tion carefully forbore to mention the subject of slavery by name ; and it is an axiom that every grave state paper is to be interpreted by the well-known opinions of its authors in the matters to which it relates. The difficult points in settling the Constitution are those which relate to slavery. The Convention threatened to be wrecked upon it. Now we have the opinion of this subject held by the most eminent members of the Constitutional Convention, expressed either in debate upon this very instrument, or in some other connection with the same great question. In 1786, George Washington wrote to John F. Mercer : "It is among my first wishes to see some plan adopted by which slavery in this country may be abolished by law ;" and by his will he emancipated his own negroes. Thomas Jefferson says, in his Notes on Virginia, "The whole commerce between master and slave is a continual exercise of the most unremitting despotism on the one part, and degrading submission on the other. \* \* \* Indeed, I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just, and his justice cannot sleep forever ;" and Jefferson introduced into the Congress of the old Confederation, the famous and noble free clause of the Northwest Ordinance. Benjamin Franklin was President of the first Abolition Society. In the Convention, Gouverneur Morris, of Pennsylvania,

declared it to be "The curse of Heaven upon the State where it prevailed." Elbridge Gerry, of Massachusetts, said the Convention must be careful not to give any sanction to slavery. James Madison thought it "wrong to admit in the Constitution the idea that there could be property in man." And I am glad to say, upon the banks of this river, that two of the great men whom Connecticut sent to that Convention, Oliver Ellsworth and Roger Sherman, both protested against any sanction of the system by the Constitution.

It is evident that the fathers regarded slavery with aversion, and as an institution so temporary in its nature that, although essentially hostile to the very objects of the Union, it should not be a bar to union. But hating it, and convinced of its temporary character, they would not allow the great charter of our liberties to be defiled with its name. Persuaded by the same spirit of concession to a temporary evil, they allowed the slave-trade to continue until the year 1808—then to be terminated, if Congress willed.

But with the beginning of the new Government began the debate upon slavery. In the very first Congress, Mr. Parker, of Virginia, said that the clause allowing the slave-trade was contrary to revolutionary principles, and ought not to be permitted. Petitions against the slave-trade and

slavery began to present themselves. Benjamin Franklin headed an anti-slavery petition to the first Congress, which does the eyes good to read. In the debate upon receiving the petitions concerning the slave-trade, in which the slave party, before the Union was in operation, began with the cry of disunion, James Madison said that Congress might guard against the introduction of slaves into new territory.

The petitions relating to the subject were generally returned, and the petitioners were in every way reviled and insulted by the rank slave power.

In 1798, upon the question of the erection of a territorial government for Mississippi, the bill declared that the Territory should be regulated in every respect like the territory northwest of the Ohio, excepting only that slavery should not be prohibited.

Mr. Thatcher, of Massachusetts, moved to strike out the exception, and prohibit slavery, in accordance with Jefferson's original plan of prohibition in all new territory, south as well as north of the Ohio. He said, and his words have still the eloquence and pertinence of truth, "We are about to establish a government for a new country. The government of which we form a part, originated from, and is founded upon, the rights of man, and upon that ground we mean to uphold it. With

what propriety, then, can a government emanate from us in which slavery is not only tolerated, but sanctioned by law? It has, indeed, been urged, that as this territory will be settled by emigrants from the southern states, they must be allowed to have slaves; as much as to say that the people of the South are fit for nothing but slave-drivers; that if left to their own labor they would starve."

At such sentiments as these, boldly uttered by an American freeman, when the country was yet weak with a seven years' struggle for freedom, the Slave Power shook its head indignantly, and said that such remarks were very mischievous, and rejected Mr. Thatcher's motion.

The constant threat of disunion, which was freely uttered by the Slave Power, had its effect. The national slave-trade was prohibited, but not without clauses which annulled the principle of the bill—for it allowed the forfeited slaves to be sold, if a state so decreed.

The slave senators said that, undoubtedly, slavery was a misfortune. Mr. Macon, of North Carolina, said it was a curse, but the country had it, and must not talk about it, but endure it. This half concession of the justice of the anti-slavery sentiment, the extreme difficulties of inaugurating the new government, and the determination of the



Slave Power to be humored or to dissolve the Union, gradually silenced the discussion. Even Jefferson closed his mouth. Other questions of immediate importance arose. The war of 1812 was to be fought. Meanwhile, the introduction of new Southern States, especially adapted, as was asserted, to slave-labor, the sudden and immense increase of the cotton interest, only served to resolve the Slave Power to make the long silence upon the question the sleep of death.

But in 1819, the volcano began to smoke once more. Then took place the great debate upon the Missouri Compromise. Mr. Tallmadge, of New York, spoke on the occasion for America and mankind. His words have so singular a pertinence to the debates of this day in Congress, that I quote a few of them :

“If it is not safe now to discuss slavery on this floor, if it cannot now come before us as a proper subject of general legislation, what will be the result when it is spread through your widely-extended domain? Its present threatening aspect, and the violence of its supporters, so far from inducing me to yield to its progress, prompt me to resist its march. Now is the time! The extension of the evil must now be prevented, or the opportunity will be lost forever. \* \* \* If the Western country cannot be settled without slavery, gladly

would I prevent its settlement till time shall be no more."

Mr. Cobb, of Georgia, fixing his eyes upon Tallmadge, said, as the slave section has always said, that if the Northern members persisted, the Union would be dissolved.

Mr. Tallmadge—let us remember his name, young Americans, with those of our great men—Mr. Tallmadge said: "Language of this sort has no effect upon me. My purpose is fixed. It is interwoven with my existence. Its durability is limited with my life. It is a great and glorious cause, setting bounds to slavery the most cruel and debasing the world has ever witnessed. It is the cause of the freedom of man."

It was the most famous debate in our history. Rufus King frankly declared that it was a question of slave or free policy in the National Government. Every argument that has been used in the discussion by the Slave Power during the last two years was then presented, and completely refuted by the representatives of freedom. The legislatures of the states especially instructed their representatives how to vote. The country shook as in the toils of an earthquake. The vote was taken, and the Slave Power conquered. The slave delegations voted in a body for the bill, and Mr. Pinckney wrote home, on the day of the decision, "We

have triumphed." The Slave Power *had* triumphed, because the Congress of a free people had agreed to allow slavery in territory where it had the power to prohibit it, this power being expressly acknowledged by a Slave President, and a cabinet of which John C. Calhoun was a member. It had extended to a free territory the privilege of representation upon a basis of slaves, thus deliberately preferring the slave system of labor, to which privilege there was not the shadow of claim, and which had been granted to the Revolutionary slave states in consideration of the system which existed there at the time of the formation of the Union, and of the great mutual struggle just passed. John Quincy Adams, also one of the cabinet, recorded his opinion that it was a triumph of the Slave Power. It was so considered then. Time has proved it since.

At the same time with the passage of the Missouri Compromise, President Monroe ceded to Spain the region now known as the state of Texas, in consideration of the territory embracing the state of Florida.

This completed the line of slavery along the Atlantic. The President was reproached by the slave party for thus ceding territory which would allow a free state to lie on the very lines of slavery. Mr. Monroe wrote to Gen. Jackson that

the cession was necessary to pacify the Northern sentiment. He knew that having secured Florida to slavery, Texas could be retaken when wanted. Gen. Jackson replied, that "for the present we ought to be contented with the Floridas." *We* meaning the slave party.

All this is what is humorously termed "a settlement" of the slave question—the Slave Power having "settled" the question of the Territories and Texas as the wolf settled Little Red Riding Hood and Little Red Riding Hood's Grandmother. This word "settlement" is the eternal tragical joke of our political history.

For some years after 1820 the subject was not directly vexed, but the resolution of the Slave Power never relaxed. If the moral minority from the North ventured a word which favored a decent respect for the principles of our Government, the Slave Power had only to shake its gory locks and cry "disunion," and the frightened North hurried to abdicate its constitutional rights and moral honor.

In 1835, Mr. Calhoun, the most sagacious of southern statesmen, opposed the reception of petitions by Congress which alluded to the subject of Slavery. Even in the District of Columbia, Slavery denied the right of petition, because it must, in the nature of the case, deny every natu-



ral right of man or of freemen. The moral minority, headed by John Quincy Adams, white-headed patriarch of Constitutional liberty, gave battle. Mr. Calhoun cried "disunion." The Slave Power echoed "disunion," and the right of petition was denied to freemen by the legislators they had themselves appointed.

This was an immense victory for the Slave Power; for it revealed to them a state of demoralization in the party of Freedom. It showed the Slave Power that it could accomplish its ends by depending upon the moral weakness of the enemy rather than upon its own numerical strength. The historian commemorates a national crime when he records that during all these debates the party of Freedom had a majority of votes in Congress.

From the moment of this clear perception of Northern demoralization the course of the Slave Power has been swift and fearful. Texas was, of course, soon retaken, entailing upon us a war with Mexico, and opening an outlet for Slavery which seemed illimitable among the miserable states of the great Isthmus.

During the few subsequent years the national demoralization seemed to be complete. The great American experiment was palpably failing. A Republic or government of the majority, whose permanent prosperity must depend upon free la-

bor, was yielding to the policy of slave-labor as a national principle. The Federal Government in its most important initiative function, that of making the organic laws of new territories, was administered exclusively for the benefit of a small privileged class, that privilege resting upon the most odious human crime. The Union had come to mean a league for the diffusion of Slavery among men. The Constitution was declared to have been framed to nationalize the system, and was so interpreted. It was perfectly understood that political preferment depended upon subservience to the Slave Power. He only could be chief among freemen—he only head of a Government which was founded to secure the blessings of Liberty, who favored the extension of human Slavery.

At the North the whole question was settled by calling it a very difficult question. So closely entwined were the interest of trade and the slave system, that the subject was not allowed to be discussed. The professed abolitionists were reviled as fanatical traitors, and the entire practical silence of the North was justified by saying that the discussion of the subject had only increased the difficulty by inflaming the Slave Power ; as if, because a burglar may shoot you if you oppose him, therefore burglary must not be mentioned.

The question was considered so difficult that it was never asked. We were sinking deeper and deeper in the slough, and, because it was so very hard to get out, we must not even make the effort to escape suffocation. Good manners forbade all allusion to slavery. All places which Northerners and Southerners frequented, Newport, Saratoga, the mountains, among which Liberty was born, and the sea, which is the very symbol of Freedom, across which she has fled a hundred times to found her immortal empire, were silent over the spreading pestilence. The pulpit held its tongue; the press, which in a free land should be the alarm bell of liberty, was muffled. If a man from the free states died for liberty, as Lovejoy died at Alton, he was called a fanatical fool, and Freedom had no other epitaph for her martyr. Other countries to which we superciliously asserted our superiority asked, contemptuously, "What is this Republic which makes cattle of men, and whips women when they grieve that their children are sold away from them?" And we replied: "You don't understand the peculiarities of the situation." We tried to believe that the Slave Power regretted slavery, because it said, with every new link of the chain it forged, that it was a great misfortune. But when the chain was long enough and strong enough, as it had now grown to be,

the Slave Power deserted the old ground that the system was a necessary but temporary evil, and claimed that slavery was a divinely-appointed missionary system for the Africans—an institution just in itself and profitable for the country.

The two most eminent living statesmen, Mr. Clay and Mr. Webster, protested, indeed, that they were opposed to the extension of slave territory. But Mr. Clay was himself a slaveholder, and a little later Mr. Webster refused to vote to prohibit slavery in free territory.

The Slave Power was mad with its own success. Its pride grew purple with audacity. It called smooth, complaisant men in the free states, who forbore to say that slavery was a sin, and who worked hard in the interest of the Slave Power, patriots and lovers of the Union—as if a political and commercial union might not be bought at too dear a price. But, pursuing its great end—namely, the absolute numerical control of the Federal Government—the Slave Power tried once more the quality of free state humanity and patriotism. The fugitive slave bill was passed.

I say no more of that bill than that it manifestly prefers the inhuman letter of the law to the justice which is the end of all law. It was a measure in the interest of slavery and not of Freedom, and it was passed under the old threat



of disunion from the Slave Power. But the North seemed to be eager for shame. The free states hurried to kiss the foot of the monstrous power that claimed the most servile allegiance. Gesler put his cap upon the pole, the people bowed in homage, and the fainting hope of the world murmured, "Then William Tell is dead."

History is not a series of causeless consequences. Event follows event in time, as minute follows minute in the day. I tell you that if the Slave Power had not found itself obsequiously courted by what was called the respectable public opinion of Boston, to do its worst wrong in the very shadow of Faneuil Hall, a son of Boston and a senator from Massachusetts would never have been smitten to the floor, unawares and defenceless, for having spoken to a greater issue of the same cause for which Samuel Adams and James Otis spoke, and Joseph Warren fell.

The course of the Slave Power was now reckless. There was no longer need of concealment or moderation when its natural enemy was its most servile ally. It resolved to strike one final blow to secure the future and to put the question of slavery extension beyond debate. Human affairs are uncertain. The support it had received from the North might be withdrawn. There might be a reaction. Freedom might resume that actual

superiority which it still had, numerically, in Congress. The circumstances attending the passage of the fugitive slave bill having exposed the entire demoralization of the free majority, it was to be supposed that no resistance would be made to any audacity.

In that spirit, and with that knowledge, the Missouri Compromise was repealed, and all the western territory of the United States, larger in area than all the settled states, was opened to the possibility of slave-labor. The Slave Power threw off every mask of nationality, of common honor, and of common decency. It deliberately did a deed which would have caused an individual to be hooted from the society of honest men and branded as a liar. Its darling doctrine was that the Union is a contract. But a national contract exists only in the honor of the parties, and the Slave Power repudiated its honor as it had lost its shame. As a man swindles a friend to support a prostitute who ruins him soul and body, so the Slave Power broke its faith with the free states to cherish an institution which has been its physical and moral destruction. Whom the gods would destroy they first madden, and so lawless, so audacious, so appalling, was this assault upon the slavish submission of the free states, that it instantly restored them their sight if not their

strength, and, God willing, the glad future shall cry that William Tell was not dead but sleeping.

I shall not repeat the history of the Kansas iniquity. You know that every one of the slight pretences of protection for free institutions in Mr. Douglas's bill was immediately destroyed. You know that the bill affected to allow the people of Kansas to settle their own government, and you know that the President of the United States senate which passed the bill, himself led hordes of men from Missouri and controlled the elections against the people of Kansas. You know that the delegates, so elected, passed laws for the Territory, which outraged humanity, common sense, and the Constitution of the United States. You know that the people of Kansas refused to submit to a Missouri mob. You know that the President of the United States endeavored to compel that submission by means of the national army. It was the final triumph of the Slave Power. Its success could not be greater. The President of the United States orders the army of the United States to force slavery upon a free territory, and while I speak to you the crime goes on. But also while I speak to you twenty millions of a moral people, politically dedicated to liberty, are asking themselves whether their government shall be

administered solely in the interest of three hundred and fifty thousand slaveholders.

At last we are overtaken by a sense of the grandeur of the issue before us ; but so long did God delay the dawning that good men despaired of day.

Do you ask me our duty as scholars? Gentlemen, thought, which the scholar represents, is life and liberty. There is no intellectual or moral life without liberty. Therefore, as a man must breathe and see before he can study, the scholar must have liberty, first of all ; and as the American scholar is a man and has a voice in his own government, so his interest in political affairs must precede all others. He must build his house before he can live in it. He must be a perpetual inspiration of freedom in politics. He must recognize that the intelligent exercise of political rights which is a privilege in a monarchy, is a duty in a republic. If it clash with his ease, his retirement, his taste, his study, let it clash, but let him do his duty. The course of events is incessant, and when the good deed is slighted, the bad deed is done.

Young scholars, young Americans, young men, we are all called upon to do a great duty. Nobody is released from it. It is a work to be done by hard strokes, and everywhere. I see a rising



enthusiasm, but enthusiasm is not an election ; and I hear cheers from the heart, but cheers are not votes. Every man must labor with his neighbor, in the street, at the plough, at the bench, early and late, at home and abroad. Generally we are concerned, in elections, with the measures of government. This time it is with the essential principle of government itself. Therefore, there must be no doubt about our leader. He must not prevaricate, or stand in the fog, or use terms to court popular favor, which every demagogue and traitor has always used. If he say he favors the interest of the whole country, let him frankly say whether he think the interest of the whole country demands the extension of slavery. If he declares for the Union, let him say whether he means a Union for freedom or for slavery. If he swear by the Constitution, let him state, so that the humblest free laborer can hear and understand, whether he believes the Constitution means to prefer slave-labor to free labor in the national representation of the territories. Ask him as an honest man, in a great crisis, if he be for the Union, the Constitution, and slavery extension, or for "*Liberty* and union, now and forever, one and inseparable."

Scholars, you would like to loiter in the pleasant paths of study. Every man loves his ease—loves to please his taste. But into how many



homes along this lovely valley came the news of Lexington and Bunker Hill, eighty years ago, and young men like us, studious, fond of leisure, young lovers, young husbands, young brothers, and sons, knew that they must forsake the wooded hillside, the river-meadows, golden with harvest, the twilight-walk along the river, the summer Sunday in the old church, parents, wife, child, mistress, and go away to uncertain war. Putnam heard the call at his plough, and turned to go, without waiting. Wooster heard it, and obeyed.

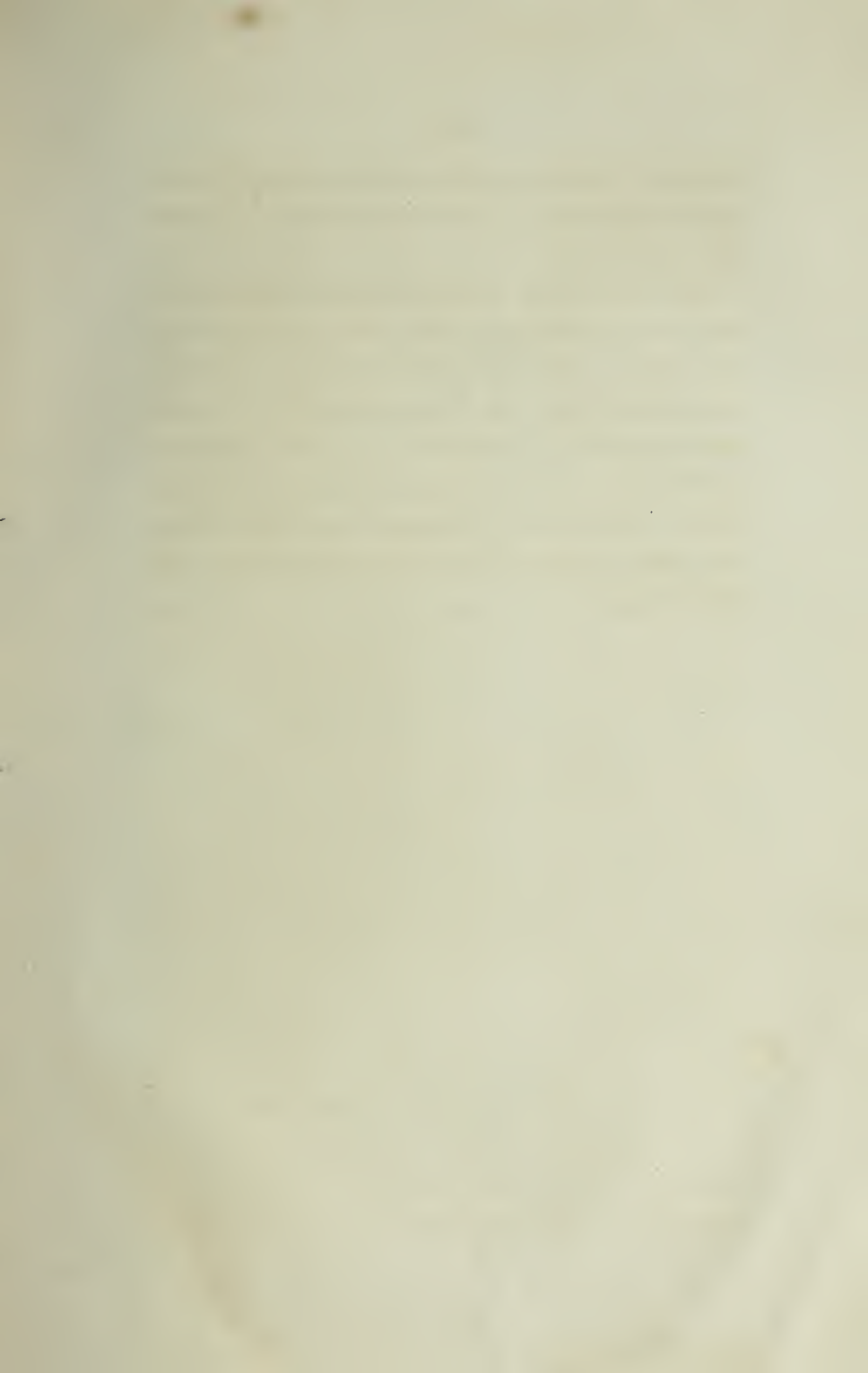
Not less lovely in those days was this peaceful valley, not less soft this summer air. Life was dear, and love as beautiful, to those young men as it is to us, who stand upon their graves. But because they were so dear and beautiful, those men went out, bravely to fight for them and fall. Through these very streets they marched, who never returned. They fell, and were buried; but they can never die. Not sweeter are the flowers that make your valley fair, not greener are the pines that give your river its name, than the memory of the brave men who died for freedom. And yet, no victim of those days, sleeping under the green sod of Connecticut, is more truly a martyr of Liberty than every murdered man whose bones lie bleaching in this summer sun upon the silent plains of Kansas.

Gentlemen, while we read history, we make history. Because our fathers fought in this great cause, we must not hope to escape fighting. Because, two thousand years ago, Leonidas stood against Xerxes, we must not suppose that Xerxes was slain, nor, thank God, that Leonidas is not immortal. Every great crisis of human history is a pass of Thermopylæ, and there is always a Leonidas and his three hundred to die in it, if they cannot conquer. And so long as Liberty has one martyr, so long as one drop of blood is poured out for her, so long from that single drop of bloody sweat of the agony of humanity shall spring hosts as countless as the forest leaves, and mighty as the sea.

Brothers! the call has come to us. I bring it to you in these calm retreats. I summon you to the great fight of Freedom. I call upon you to say, with your voices, whenever the occasion offers, and with your votes, when the day comes, that upon these fertile fields of Kansas, in the very heart of the continent, the upas tree of slavery, dripping death dews upon national prosperity, and upon free-labor, shall never be planted. I call upon you to plant there the palm of peace, the vine and the olive of a Christian civilization. I call upon you to determine whether this great experiment of human freedom, which has been the

scorn of despotism, shall, by its failure, be also our sin and shame. I call upon you to defend the hope of the world.

The voice of our brothers who are bleeding, no less than of our fathers who bled, summons us to this battle. Shall the children of unborn generations, clustering over that vast western empire, rise up and call us blessed or cursed? Here are our Marathon and Lexington; here are our heroic fields. The hearts of all good men beat with us. The fight is fierce—the issue is with God. But God is good.







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